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ABSTRACT

This paper describes the outcomes of two study groups, one for teachers and one for principals that provide an interactive and innovative approach to curriculum change. The study groups were implemented as an alternative form of professional development in the Tucson (Arizona) Unified School District when it changed from a basal reader approach to a literature-based curriculum. Data were derived from interviews with participants, field notes of meetings, and participants' written end-of-year reflections. Participants reported that the groups provided them with a means to build community, encouraged development of the theory-practice connection, helped build a knowledge base about the change process and curriculum reform, and provided an innovative context for adult learning. Teachers and principals shared six major concerns about the literature-based curriculum and curriculum reform: (1) logistical obstacles, such as time, materials, and building design; (2) obstacles of district mandates; (3) evaluations as an obstacle and driving force for reform; (4) issues of control/hierarchy and the move toward collaborative relationships; (5) integrating theory and practice; and (6) dealing with change within schools. The findings highlight the sense of isolation shared by teachers and principals, the value they placed on developing a sense of community with their peers, and their need for more time for reflection. (LMI)

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Principal Study Groups and Teacher Study Groups:

An Interactive and Innovative Approach to Curriculum Change

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Introduction

Recently, many schools have begun to move away from instructional practices which emphasize passivity, rote-like instruction, limited social interactions, and low-level academic work to a focus on meaning-based, interactive approaches to literacy instruction (Moll, 1991). In these interactive approaches, children have considerable control over their learning and are active users of literacy to accomplish high level academic tasks.
A major issue which has emerged from the interest in new approaches to literacy has been how to support teachers and administrators in critically examining their beliefs about literacy learning and their instructional practices. While these new approaches are based in a different set of beliefs about reading and learning than those which have guided instruction in most schools, these beliefs are rarely examined and, in most cases, schools have simply changed the materials used for instruction or added a couple of new activities. Many schools have relied on traditional one or two day inservices to introduce teachers and principals to the new programs. The research on change and curriculum reform indicates that no innovation has a realistic chance of succeeding unless teachers and principals are thoroughly involved in the process, are able to express, define, and address problems as they see them, and make the innovation or change their own (Fullan, 1991; Lieberman & Miller, 1991).

A major theoretical belief that has been at the heart of our work with study groups is that teachers and principals need to be at the center of their own learning. While current approaches to curriculum focus on placing students at the center of their learning processes, the professional development opportunities offered to teachers and administrators rarely allow them to be active participants in their own learning. One of the reasons why educators may experience difficulty in creating collaborative learning environments in schools is that they have never experienced that kind of learning environment for themselves. University courses rarely create collaborative learning environments where students are actively engaged in learning that is significant to them (Short & Burke, 1990).

We believe that professional development programs and research on adult learning must address how teachers and administrators themselves can gain knowledge, critique, reflect, and transform themselves, and eventually take their place among others in bringing about educational change and reform. Until educators are given the time and opportunity to examine their assumptions about teaching and learning, major obstacles will continue to impede the implementation of instructional innovations (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1990).

Short-term inservices provide educators with "recipes" for change. These "recipes," in turn, produce short-term changes. Instead of prescriptive

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mandates or packaged programs to follow, educators need to work with each other to think, analyze, and create conditions for change within their specific circumstances that relate to their personal or professional needs. The short-term inservices, conferences, and workshops currently offered do serve a function in exposing teachers and administrators to new perspectives, theories, and practices but they do not support the day-to-day living of schools and classrooms or allow educators to be active participants in their own growth and learning.

Study groups are one possibility for providing a supportive social context for exchange about literacy issues among educators. Study groups do not begin with a specific agenda or plan of staff development, but with a focus on supporting professional growth. The study group provides a social context for participants to collaboratively negotiate the agenda. Teachers, administrators, and facilitators can take a step back away from their practice and beliefs and, in a supportive environment, critique their practice and beliefs about school and learning by using knowledge gained through the study group process and other resources (Moll, 1990).

Study groups are not based in a deficit model, as so many "teacher change" projects have been in the past. Teacher change project, for the most part, have been based in the belief that if we just find out what is wrong with teachers or principals and then offer a program to "fix" them, our problems will be solved (Miller, 1990). The "fix it" perspective comes from the same traditional/transmission model of learning which we are moving away from with children. Change needs to be seen as a natural part of the learning process and of teachers' and principals' professional growth (Lester & Onore, 1990).

Overview of the Research Studies

Three years ago, Tucson Unified School District, which has 78 elementary schools, changed from a traditional basal reader approach to a literature anthology and sets of books. Teachers were offered 1 day workshops to facilitate this mandated change. Based on the work of Elizabeth Saavedra and Luis Moll (Moll, 1991), Kathy proposed the study group as an alternative form of professional development to the district.

Two neighboring schools volunteered, Warren and Maldonado Elementary schools, both serving culturally diverse, working class neighborhoods. Teachers were not required to join the group. It was presented as an option and 2/3's of the teachers from Warren, 4 teachers from Maldonado, and the principal and librarian from Warren joined the initial group. There were 19 people in the group of which 12-15 were at any given meeting.

We met for about an hour and a half every other week right after school at Warren. Our broad focus as a group was initially defined as literature and ways to use literature more powerfully in the classroom, but we talked about many other aspects of learning and curriculum and constantly moved back and forth between theoretical and practical issues. At the first study group session each year, the group brainstormed topics and issues they would like to discuss and these became the basis for choosing the initial group focus. The study group sessions usually began with a short sharing time during which we engaged in social conversations and shared classroom experiences. We then moved into discussing our focus for that session. At the end of each session, we would make a decision on what we wanted to discuss the next time and whether to do some type of professional reading or classroom experience before our next meeting to prepare for that discussion. Because we had two weeks between each meeting, there was time to get everyone an article if we had agreed to read something or to try something in the classroom. Sometimes we abandoned our focus because some other "hot" issue had come up and we discussed that instead.

During the first two years, Kathy served as the facilitator for the group

meetings and went to the school one day a week to work in classrooms. A sign-up sheet with open time slots was posted in the school and teachers who wanted to work or think with her signed their names. In the second year, the Maldondo teachers split off and formed a study group at their own school. They realized from the first year data analysis that they were benefitting individually but not benefitting as a school community. They served as their own facilitators and arranged to have a substitute to come to the building one day a week so they could do teacher-teacher visits to each others' classrooms. Both groups are now completing their third year and have taken over the study group process. Kathy attends occasionally as a participant but the teachers are organizing and facilitating the groups themselves.

Because the teacher study group process was so collaborative, we believed the research also needed to be a collaborative process, both in terms of data collection and data analysis (Klassen & Short, 1992). Kathy received several small grants to cover teacher stipends and five teachers have met the past two summers and will again meet this summer to work at data analysis. In the summer group, we have primarily focused on the interviews with each participant at the end of the year and the transcripts and field notes of the study group sessions . This data has been coded using the constant comparative method (Glaser & Straus, 1967) to develop categories. A report of the first year data can be found in Short, Crawford, Kahn, Kaser, Klassen, & Sherman, 1992.

The district offered the study group as an option to other schools and other schools have formed teacher study groups. Some have been facilitated by teachers from that school. There was also a core of facilitators who were teachers or other educators from within the district that met with Elizabeth Saavedra in a study group on study groups weekly for one semester before they started working with the study groups in the schools.

In addition, a principal study group has been meeting for the past two years. The group meets weekly from January until the beginning of April. We meet early Wednesday mornings and follow the same format as the teacher groups of sharing, focusing on a topic of concern to the group, and then deciding what to talk about the following week. This group grew out of the observation by the principal from one of the teacher study groups that, while she was benefitting greatly from being part of the school study group, she had no place to talk with peers about her issues and concerns as a principal. In the first meeting of this group, principals talked about their isolation and the lack of professional development. Their meetings usually consist of handing out new procedures about bus routes and test scores instead of meaningful dialogue with colleagues or consideration of their professional issues and concerns. Kathy is the facilitator for this group along with Becky Montano, a district central administrator. Cyndi was involved with the group the first year and Cyndi, Gail, and Kathy have worked as a team in the data analysis. The data from this group consists of field notes and audiotapes of the group sessions, written reflections at the end of the study group, and individual oral interviews with each principal. Both the principal study group and the teacher study groups have been supported by the Tucson Unified School District through K-3 Programs.

The data in this paper has been drawn from both research studies to compare the responses of the teachers and the principals and see what kinds of similarities as well as differences went across the two groups in terms of what they found significant about the study group experience and what kinds of issues and concerns they faced in curriculum reform. These two questions grew out of our concerns about curriculum reform, first in relation to the study group as an alternative form of professional development that might support educators involved in continuous professional growth and reform and, secondly, our interest in identifying the issues and concerns of teachers and principals as they are involved in curriculum reform and day-to-day living in schools. The data reported here comes from the first and second year analysis of the teacher study group and the first year analysis of the principal study group.

What was significant about the study group experience from the perspective of the participants?

Carter (1993) describes the use of story as a method and as an object of inquiry. She explains, a story is "a theory of something" and "what we tell and how we tell it is a revelation of what we believe" (p. 9). In this particular instance, this is the story of twenty-three elementary school principals and 32 teachers who came together to form two separate study groups. It is the story of their struggle to facilitate change from traditional basal curriculum to literature-based curriculum in their school communities. Through their stories, these principals and teachers continue to transform the content of their study groups into a form that is played out in their individual schools (Carter, 1993). These two study groups became the framework for their stories-- stories that were told not to strangers, but to colleagues experiencing many of the same things (Morgan, 1992).

This paper explores what was significant about the study group experience from the perspective of the participants. The data used for this paper came from end-of-the-year written reflections and interviews. Across this data, several categories emerged. Four of the major categories that emerged and will be presented here are: 1) Building a community, 2) Building a knowledge base about curriculum, 3) Building a knowledge base about the change process and curriculum reform and 4) Experiencing the study group as an innovative context for adult learning. The analysis of the data suggest if we are going to be part of educational reform, we must listen to the voices of the participants; voices that speak and write of their own thoughts, feelings, beliefs, questions, and experiences in relation to the study groups (Fox, 1993). This is what these teachers and principals have to say.

Building a community

The study group provided the means to build a community for each of the two groups. This community helped to allay professional isolation, supported networking, and promoted sharing and dialogue among teachers and among principals.

Teacher: "I'm a new teacher and I felt lost but the study group made me feel that I wasn't alone. Because other people in the group with more teaching experience talked about having problems, I realized I wasn't alone in my problems. If I had felt I was alone, my self image would have been bad."

Principal: "This is a good place for new principals who are overwhelmed and have no place to talk."

Teacher: "We rarely get to develop collegial relationships. We need to learn to dialogue with others on professional issues. We need to share and reply rather than present and assess. I'm not used to having the chance to discuss practice in a non-evaluative way."

Principal: "We seldom get to be together and think. It doesn't matter whether the person thinks like me or not. It's important to think together and to learn to not put someone else down who thinks differently."

Teacher: "If teachers are sharing and asking for help and feeling comfortable, then that spills over into the classroom. It helps everyone, including our students."

Principal: "The people in that group are the ones I would go to if I had an issue to solve. I would call one of the principals in the group. We are a body of people who are available to each other. We have an understanding of what each other knows. You have to know each other in order to know to ask that person about a particular problem and to feel comfortable asking. I feel I could approach anyone from that group."

Both the teachers and the principals used an "island" metaphor to talk about the isolation and need for sharing.

Teacher: "Having a designated time to talk about what happens in the classroom is important. We are like islands. Through the study group, we realize we are not the only ones who have problems or who are making discoveries. We also get to see other people's growth."

Principal: "When principals get together it's like we are shipwrecked on an island together. You can't hand out advice unless you've been in the role of the principal. There's an immediate rapport and connection among principals because we share those experiences."

Instrumental to these communities was the opportunity to talk with each other on both a professional and social level.

Teacher: The group created a need for talk with other teachers. It created agendas for talking to each other at lunch, in hallways, and on the drive to and from school."

Principal: "Its <u>always</u> good to get together with peers to discuss school matters as well as learning and teaching matters. Principalship is one of life's singular jobs in which there's not an immediate collegial group."

Teachers and principals interacted with other teachers and principals in ways they had not before.

Teacher: People at this school are getting along better. The relationships are smoother...." "We are less competitive and can speak our minds now. You can ask someone to use an idea instead of just using it on the side. We respect and acknowledge the other person now."

Principal: "It has meant a chance to interact with peers that I respect and enjoy and hardly ever get to talk to. To me, they are the 'meat' of education. Their years of experience, expertise, and knowledge is invaluable to me. I have learned a lot from them. I have also learned that I know a few things and that I am doing something right."

For these teachers and principals, one significant aspect of the study group was the opportunity to build a community. This community invited them to interact on a regular basis about issues of concern, gave them a chance to see how other people handled issues they were also dealing with, and often afforded them the window to see others were just as frustrated and concerned. They found they were not alone.

Building a knowledge base about curriculum

The study group invited the teachers and principals to connect theory and practice. It allowed for the creation of shared understandings and language about curriculum. Teachers and principals were able to explore changes in their beliefs and practices, express contradictions in beliefs, and deal with implementation issues.

Teacher: "Before the group started I was really comfortable using textbooks and then supplementing and spicing the textbooks with literature and activities. It takes a lot of planning and extra work in terms of units and materials to teach the way we are now. Professionally I don't want to go back to the textbooks and I know what we are doing is better but personally it was easier."

Principal: "I needed a knowledge base on curriculum, the development of the early learner, reading and writing processes, expectations in children's education at different steps, how children learn to read, what is whole language and what is writing process. I need a general base so I can talk to teachers about problems in learning and teaching."

Teacher: "At the beginning, the group was more philosophical but then it moved to practice. This isn't like what we get at the university. What we get there is useless. It is philosophies that are not tied to practice. I want the ideas and the why behind those ideas."

Each group talked about the changes they made or were in the process of making in relation to their needs.

Teacher: "My largest growth has been in the literature study. I did not know how to work with the literature groups. I always directed them too much. They were more teacher-directed than child-directed because then I had the security of knowing there would be some result from the group; something to measure. I would give them cards with questions to answer in their groups when I wasn't there. Now I am moving away from the cards."

Principal: "I needed to learn what the move, [literature-based] was all about. I needed to expand my knowledge base. I have to work with teachers and be of assistance and a leader."

Teacher: "I'm working at providing a structure that feels safe and conducive to reading and writing and that has openness and choice but not chaos."

Principal: "[My teachers] realize that I am also learning the process and do not have all the answers. Their struggles and questions are also my struggles and questions. It has been easier to share and dialogue with teachers as they recognize that I am developing a knowledge base that allows me to recognize their efforts."

With this new knowledge base about curriculum came questions concerning evaluation.

Teacher: "I am better able to look at things, to evaluate where students are in language and reading skills. I am more cognizant of looking at writing and reading logs. I look at them as products in process and I see more."

Principal: "What are terms administrators can use with teachers, those who are beginning as well as those who are doing a lot in their classrooms? I don't just want to say this was great. I want to be able to give specific feedback, not 'great job on the Cinderella variants.'"

Ultimately, many of the participants felt the bottom line involved "getting at the process and ways to help teachers and students meet the curriculum goals" (Principal).

Building a knowledge base about the change process and curriculum reform

In building a knowledge base about the change process and curriculum reform, teachers and principals voiced personal fears and approaches to change. They talked about the difficulty of facilitating the growth of students, parents, and each other. They clearly articulated the ways in which professional development does and does not support curriculum reform and the obstacles to reform.

These teachers and principals were taking the challenge to try new things, while giving themselves permission to take it slowly.

Teacher: "I learned that if you believe in something, you keep on going even if it doesn't work out right away. I don't feel like I have to have all the answers any more."

Principal: "We have changed our faculty meetings so teachers can say what they want to have in those meetings. We briefly touch on business and then we talk about the projects teachers are doing. It's not just a meeting but an exchange of ideas."

Teacher: "This year I used what I knew without going any further. It takes time to use ideas and feel comfortable. I wanted to stay with the same ideas this year."

Principal: "That's the most important role (curricular reform) but I get so bogged down that it doesn't get done. If I don't do that role, then I'm just a business manager. I need to be real organized in taking care of details to have time."

Teacher: "I realize that things take longer than I had ever anticipated. Before I taught tiny pieces. Life is connected so I have to teach that way."

For some of the principals, their impatience with the slowness of change evolved to an understanding of the necessity of time.

Principal: "By observing teachers in their classrooms and interacting with them in group, I have gained greater respect for them. I can see examples of situations where in the past I would have said, 'I wish this was different' about something I saw in someone's classroom without understanding the why behind what was going on. I see that a beginning attempt to make a change could be seen as chaos or disinterest. Now I see what is being attempted and try to make suggestions because of the study group."

And yet another principal added....

Principal: "It helped to have you say that there were teachers at [the school] who sat through the whole year and listened without doing anything until the following year. Other principals discussed different situations and how slow change was. That let me see how reluctant people are to change and that just because I don't see outward change doesn't mean that they aren't thinking and that things aren't going on."

For these teachers and principals, building a knowledge base about the change process and curriculum reform helped them to see their school sites in a different light. Communication opened up and greater understanding of what each was attempting became clearer. Teachers and principals realized a lot of thought was going into this curriculum reform and the actualization of thought did indeed take time.

Experiencing the study group as an innovative context for adult learning

The study group provided a vehicle for informal and negotiated agendas, opportunities for sharing and learning to know others, and conveyed the importance of active and collaborative learning for adults. But for some participants the study groups created problems.

Principal: "The times I was in the group, I felt pulled and thought about the building and whether I should be there."

Teacher: "Sometimes, though, [the study group] has brought more conflict because it brought disagreements out in the open."

Principal: "In the principal group, I turned the group off when people were sharing problems of school. I see that as too individual and so I turned them off."

For most of the participants, however, the study group provided the means for a unique and positive learning experience.

Teacher: "The study group has meant support. It is a place where I feel comfortable, even when the principal is there. I can say how I am feeling about what I am doing. I can ask questions and not be put down. I need a support group in order to change my teaching."

Principal: "I need support and reinforcement to let me know that I am doing a good job. This is the first job that I have been in where that is completely missing. As a principal, all you get is people yelling at you. There is very little reinforcement, sometimes we all need to hear that we've done something well."

Teacher: "The study group has been a way to get to know people I work with. To understand their philosophical bases for their classrooms and to know them personally."

Principal: "I feel as a new principal I have a support group of others who have a common base of knowledge. Part of the time I have found myself learning new ways to handle problems, other times I have felt affirmed, and other times gaining knowledge about nitty gritty work that I have been avoiding I am sure this group has made me feel more secure in doing a new job."

Teacher: "Last year I had so much energy because it was all new. This year, the newness wears off, and you might give it up but the study group keeps you moving. This year different people began to try things and experience things. They had the ah-ha's and energy and were asking questions and struggling."

Principal: "A strong sense of support was received. I was reminded weekly that I was not alone in facing the world's daily problems. Seeing and hearing others dealing with the same issues helped provide a sense of sanity."

Teacher: "The support group has meant two major things to me- professional support and professional sharing. The professional sharing is more than lounge sharing. In lounge sharing, we may talk about teaching some but it's not the focus of conversation. In study group, we have scheduled topics. I like knowing ahead so I can think about it. I like being with teachers and there's no time to do that. It's a professional support because I hear others talk about their problems and I realize that it's O.K. not to be perfect. We share what's good and what's not."

Principal: "A cadre of administrators has developed. This cadre can serve as a support base and problem-solving team in the future. If I had a 'problem' to solve or resolve or was in the need of advice, I feel there are a variety of perspectives/people I could consult."

The teachers and the principals discussed the flexible agenda and the nature of the study group itself.

Principal: "I liked the whole concept of [the agenda] being self-generated in a sense. Yes, sometimes we had particular areas in mind to discuss but other times when we were all bothered by something going on in the district we were allowed to vent it. I think the way we moved through a number of areas of interest were helpful but also made me want to know more."

Teacher: "I liked it when we, not Kathy, made the agenda. We sat back and took time to figure out the agenda."

Principal: "The informality of the group although there was a specific agenda allowed us to freely explore thoughts, opinions, and questions. This [study group] was a priority for me to the extent that my Wednesdays were planned around this time frame- nothing else was a priority except this."

The study group was an experience like no others for the participants. As one proclaimed,"The study group was a valuable experience and I can't say that about a lot of things." For these participants, the study group was indeed a significant experience and an innovative context for adult learning.

What Issues and Questions Do Principals and Teachers Have About Literature Based Curriculum and Curriculum Reform?

The second research question was, "What issues and questions do principals and teachers have about literature based curriculum and curriculum reform?" This question is significant because curriculum reform has often failed because of a lack of knowledge and understanding about the real issues and concerns of principals and teachers. What are the obstacles and what supports curriculum reform? We had an opportunity to find out through the study group experience with principals and teachers, what really does exist rather than what we "think" exists. We asked the people who are directly involved, what the issues are.

The data that was analyzed for this question consisted of field notes from the principal's study group, transcripts from the teacher study groups, transcribed final interviews and written reflections done at the end of both the teacher's and principal's study groups. Data analysis is in process and includes creating categories, coding data and defining the categories.

The following section presents the six major categories with what we believe are the most significant and powerful quotes from the data generated by the principal and teacher study groups. We found interesting similarities and differences across and between principals and teachers on various issues and concerns.

Category 1: Logistical Obstacles: Time, Materials, and Building Design

Time for Teachers to Talk and Think Together

T: Four or five years ago, we used to learn new things with the faculty at this school. Now we don't see people much anymore because of the lunch schedule and the after school program. There's no time to be with other teachers.

P: I am playing with the lunch times at my school. The teachers want to eat with different people, so I have first and fourth grade eating together. This way they can get to know one another.

T: Having a designated time to talk about what happens in the classroom is important. We are like islands. Through the study group, we realize we are not the only ones who have problems or who are making discoveries. We also get to see other people's growth.

Time for Planning and Changing Curriculum and Teaching

T: Before the group started I was really comfortable using textbooks and then supplementing and spicing the textbooks with literature and activities. It takes a lot of planning and extra work in terms of units and materials to teach the way we are now. Professionally I don't want to go back to the textbooks and I know what we are doing is better but personally it was easier.

T: This year I used what I knew without going any further. It takes time to use ideas and feel comfortable. I wanted to stay with the same ideas this year.

T: Here the group is trying to make changes right away that need to take time. There's not enough time and too many pressures to do to many different things at the same time.

Time for Discussing Changes in Student Evaluation

P: Meeting with the staff is a big part of the process. It is difficult to

meet with the staff because it takes so much time and several meetings to discuss any issue. There isn't paid time for teachers to remain after school to discuss.

Using Time Effectively During Faculty Meetings

P: Because the teacher's union is very strong at my school, I had to schedule faculty meetings for 8:00-8:25 a.m. Teachers need to write down their name and an estimate of time needed to speak. I stress time management and list the item, time and topic and put these into a notebook. The business at our faculty meetings is then done in 20 minutes.

P: I limit the amount of sharing, especially for those teachers who talk a lot. The meetings are scheduled every other week for an hour and a half. There are usually one or two main topics and if these topics seem time consuming, the teacher needs to indicate that on the schedule. When there are five minutes left in the meeting, the gatekeeper tells me. It is always difficult to fine the time to talk about issues, especially this time of year when there is information the staff needs.

Resources for Change in a Large District

T: The inservice time, money, and substitutes involved in getting consensus in a district with over 3,000 teachers is very difficult.

Design of the School Building

P; We had a hard time because we wanted carpeting in all the classrooms and the man said, "But the fourth, fifth and sixth graders sit in rows and desks so we don't need carpeting in those classrooms." The mindset is that you wouldn't let sixth graders sit on the floor in a group, so they don't need carpeting. Or they don't need it for the sound either. They are noisier than the little kids.

P: The design of the school makes so much difference. The floor plan decides how teachers will interact. There tends to be a definite correlation between who interacts and where your classroom is.

P: When we moved out for renovation, with the whole school in portables, it made such a difference. It was isolation. Totally. Now that we're back in the building, people are down the hall and it's not much different. Teachers kind of went into isolation and there stopped being a lot of interaction.

Category 2: The Obstacles of District Mandates

Mandates that Devalue Principal, Teacher and Student Voices

T: When the district came out and said, "this is the portfolio" and there was no negotiation, we just stopped working on developing our own. We thought that we could develop a more student centered portfolio and that the district would look at our's as an alternative but they killed all our interest and work. Once people found out that the district would allow portfolios but they were not considered significant anymore, there was a sense of disgust and frustration.

T: The district is sending a message that there is one right way. They are saying you will, instead of consider it, take a look, and try it. It would be nice to not be told to do something, but to be encouraged.

T: In district inservices, you get one model and no encouragement to branch out to other possible models. The study group encourages different ways of trying things.

T: If teachers work hard to develop something like a portfolio in their classrooms, it's only going to be considered to be an addition to what the district requires. It's always more work added on top of other district requirements. It's never a substitute or replacement.

T: We develop something and it makes sense to us, but then it becomes standardized and mandated and it's the next generation of teachers who don't really get it. You can't give them your sense of what's valuable or the process you went through.

T: If the district takes sharing and makes it prescriptive, then it defeats the whole purpose. So if we develop something positive, then we feel like we should not let anyone else in the district know what we are doing. Because if we do share, then either it will become a mandate for everyone or we will be ordered not to do it anymore.

T: When the district makes an innovation into school policy, it's another way of controlling teachers's work and saying, "We don't trust you to be able to come up with this idea or make a decision about whether this innovation will work for you. We will remove all doubt. We're going to remove any messy democratic process." It becomes a mandate.

T: Teachers need a voice. It's like our opinion doesn't count for anything. It's like we are not professional people who have some experience with the situation.

T: What often happens in this district is that I am told that I have a choice and I spend all my time doing that work and then find out that there is a mandate and I don't have any choices.

P: I haven't yet bought into the new core curriculum. In a hugh district, buy-in is much more difficult. The curriculum is developed, then given to the principal who in turn must give it to the teachers. They have had no part in the development of curriculum.

P: I have had conversations with teachers about why you don't automatically listen to what the district tells you to do. I know this is a dangerous conversation to have, but the teachers are asking, "Why do we have to think? [We just follow district policy.]"

<u>The pressure of too many mandates and policies</u>

T: The district's enthusiasm for new ideas may lead to too many irons in the fire.

T: How do we meet the core requirements and also be whole language? How do we do everything? We just keep adding more and more. I look at all the curriculum guides we get from the district and I try to get it all in.

T: We are asked to make too many changes in too short a time. We never get to stay with one thing long enough to feel like we really know what we are doing before we are on to the next thing.

<u>Contradictory District Mandates</u>

T: So if I'm doing all literature and I'm not using the textbooks, why do my students still have to take the tests that go with the basal series? If literature was an option, then why aren't there 2 different testing procedures

based on those options?

T: The district five years ago said, "God told us this is what we're suppose to use to discipline the kids" and now they're saying, "The devil made us do it." And so this is what we're going to do until five years from now when something else comes along and then they'll change their minds again.

T: We are mandated to do innovative change in reading and move away from skills but then tested according to whether we are teaching basic skills.

T: Just when we think that the district has developed a direction, a new superintendent comes in and everything changes again.

Category 3. Evaluation as obstacle and driving force for reform

Testing and Accountability as an Obstacle to Reform

T: We have a whole public out there who think that test scores or standardized testing is the only valid way to get information about what kids are doing.

P: I have a parent who wants to move his child to a school with high test scores. There is a real lack of communication regarding what these test scores mean.

T: We keep talking about doing away with tests but we are getting more tests from the district.

T: I worry about the kids not getting the basics like spelling. Memorization still has some role in school. We have left some things behind that they still need like sight words. If I have kids memorize a list of sight words, then I feel that I have given them something to grasp. If I teach a lesson and then they take a test, I know they have learned. I need to test to see if they have succeeded.

P: Two grade levels in my school are still entrenched in using the same methods that they used twenty years ago. These teachers feel the methods are still working. They use the new reading system like the basal and they feel that it works based on test scores that document that change is not necessary.

P: Most teachers assume that standardized and norm referenced tests are equivalent. Teachers don't understand the tests they are giving.

P: The tests are given early in the year and the scores are not indicative of the current teacher's instruction. The scores should be used as a teaching tool.

P: What about the issue of independent reading? One of my teachers grades the kids on the number of pages they've read. This sends a negative message to kids. There also shouldn't be required book reports. We place pressure on the slow readers.

Evaluation as the Basis of Curriculum Change

T: I am better able to look at things, to evaluate where students are in language and reading skills. I am more cognizant of looking at writing and reading logs. I look at them as products in process and I see more.

T: I am trying to create different categories for their talk in the literature discussions. They focus on illustrations and the "rightness" of a book. In the literature discussions, I assess by listening and jotting down

notes. I can look at them and get patterns of their thinking from the notes.

T: Field notes are different from other kinds of evaluation because they helped me think about what was happening in the literature groups. I really listened to their talk. It made me aware of their level of thinking and helped me plan because I could go back and really look at what was happening in their group and their thinking about the book.

Student Self-Evaluation: Valuing Student Voices

T: Kids are so trained to please someone else. Everything they are doing is for someone else's criteria rather than to improve themselves.

T: Whenever I have had failure at getting kids to be self-reflective in the past it's because I was asking them to be self-reflective. It was something I had them do, rather than something they chose to do or saw as valuable.

T: Self-evaluation sends us a message about how students view what's happening in the classroom. What they value.

T: Kids need another way to know about themselves other than the report card. It has too much weight.

Observation and Evaluation of Teachers

P: I try to ask general, open ended questions. I ask the teacher how they brought it to that point. I value thoughtfulness in how the teacher thinks through what they are doing. My teachers are aware of this and know that being thoughtful and improving what they are doing is the key.

P: I have been videotaping teachers. The teacher then responds to the tape and use the evaluation form as a response sheet. I am usually more positive while the teacher is more critical of themselves.

P: In the written evaluation of the teacher, I begin with a lead-in paragraph stating the school's goals. Then I ask the teacher, what they devoted their energy to that year and what areas for growth require goals. The teacher identifies ways to be stronger.

P: "One teacher's reaction to my observing her language arts lesson made me rethink. I always thought I should observe where we were putting our money and school focus but that doesn't give the teacher a chance to grow and be part of the process. It's more of an instructional than an evaluative process. I'm beginning to see more how I fit in. When something bombs, I hear people in the group and at lunch really talking about it. They've really thought about it. It wasn't a poorly developed lesson. I really need to think about what to expect from teachers on planning."

Screening Prospective Teachers

P; There are principals who are eager to get rid of teachers and will lie in order to do so. The teachers who are currently interviewing are those looking to move within the district. As principals, we need to share information about those teachers.

P: Most teachers are stuck in a traditional reading program and want to break out of that by looking for a new place to go. I ask them if they are integrating literature at all and the types of books they are using.

P: I try to get an insight into what people are doing. I ask them to bring a text set, author study, or theme unit with them. Then I ask questions on how

they would integrate this into the curriculum and how they use that information. This way I can determine if the teacher really knows what they are talking about or are merely giving a textbook answer.

P: I ask about multicultural and diverse populations. I am able to hear in the way they talk about children because their attitude seeps in from the tone of their voice.

Category 4. Issues of Control and Hierarchy and the Move Toward Collaborative Relationships

The District Hierarchy: Trusting and Supporting Teachers

T: The district seems to have the fear of letting go and the notion that if they let go of control, then teachers will have less success, not more success. They believe that if they allow everyone to do lesson plans in the way we have at this school, then they are going to have 17 schools that won't plan. They don't think about the 17 schools that would plan better. They regulate for the incompetent instead of providing support for those that don't get it. Those of us who do want to make changes keep getting pushed down because they are afraid of those that don't understand. Not only do they distrust teachers, but they want to blame us for not trusting us.

Struggling with Defining the Roles of Teachers and Students

T: What if the students won't do it? Does that mean they never have to do it? There's going to be times when they're going to have to do something that they don't necessarily want to do.

T: My struggle with my students is trying to let them make these choices. They want me to make the choices. They want me to judge. They want me to evaluate. Then they want to blame me if they get a bad grade. I'm taking on all this responsibility.

T: This year I thought about my beliefs and made many changes. The most important changes were: The idea of coming from where students are instead of imposing on them. The collegiality of students working together and articulating together to learn from each other. Students searching out and putting together ideas themselves rather than memorizing. The importance of small groups. Choice. My students didn't have much choice before even in the library books they checked out. I used to assign the genre and topics of books they could check out and read from the library. I saw that as good because they were reading a variety. Now I see it differently.

T: My largest growth has been in literature study. I did not know how to work with the literature groups. I always directed them too much. They were more teacher directed than child directed because then I had the security of knowing there would be some result from the group; something to measure. I would give them cards with questions on to answer in their groups when I wasn't there.

T: As a sub, the most difficult classrooms were the ones where the teacher was authoritarian and imposed the discipline. If the locus of control is from without, from the teacher, then when the teacher leaves, there's no control. There's no sense of self-responsibility or self-reliance.

T: Some kids see literature logs as something that's for the teacher and not for themselves. It's the teacher's way of having control. It's just an assignment instead of a way to help them think about the book.

T: I have a different feeling when I go to groups to take field notes.

Taking notes releases me from the teacher role. It's hard to break from leading group discussions. I can't lead because I am writing. It takes authority away from me. When Demi said, "Ain't I good?" when she took over the group, that was powerful for me. I can still participate even if I'm taking notes.

T: One of the things I worked on this year was my organization at the beginning of the year. I worked on being organized and prepared ahead of time so that my students could take the lead and I could bring in what they needed. I worked on the structure of the day, movement in the room, and the room layout. I moved the library out of the center. The kids helped plan our new room arrangement.

T: In literature groups, I am letting go more and seeing that students are thinking and making new connections. They are bringing in their backgrounds and pulling in their thoughts.

Redefining Teacher-Principal Relationships

T: "I thought it was amazing at the last study group when the teachers did not back down from the principal's negative comment. They felt their own power. They were equal in the group. They felt that their opinion mattered. Their opinions can be different and not wrong."

T: "Before we did it because we were told to, not because we believed in it or really understood how to put it into practice. Now there's more understanding and openness."

T: "I've developed a better relationship with the principal. I know her better than other principals. She has allowed herself to be relaxed and for us to get to know her."

T: Now the principal sees me more as an equal. She feels comfortable supporting what I do and I support her. It's a fun feeling and a change in this school.

P: Principals are viewed as experts. The impact is much stronger when you have the knowledge of the literature but we do not have that knowledge. We (principals) should show that we are working and learning with teachers.

P: It is okay to take risks and it is also okay for teachers to take risks. I am taking a risk in admitting to my teachers that I need to learn about literature based and whole language. When we say we are learning too, it communicates a powerful statement to teachers. But it is also very hard to do, because when we do make a mistake we have to humble ourselves. It's hard to take risks when the teachers will "nail us" if we do make a mistake.

P: You need to establish a vision and not just tell people what to do. There is a difference between control and power. You give up control to get power and if we give up that control we are still responsible.

P: My staff has realized that I am truly interested in their efforts to change from a basal approach to a literature-based approach. They also realize that I am learning the process and do not have all the answers. Their struggles and questions are also my struggles and questions.

P: As a result of my participation in this group, I believe my teachers are beginning to view me from a different perspective--the perspective of having a site leaders who appears more confident discussing reading/writing issues and strategies.

P: The biggest change has been with teachers in my school. I am sharing more ideas and concerns. I feel that I am discussing the "principalship" more with

them. They are seeing me more as an educational leaders, not just the person who solves the discipline problems.

Category 5: Exploring Theory and Practice

Integrating Theory and Practice

T: "At the beginning, the group was more philosophical but then it moved to practice. This isn't like what we get at the university. What we get there is useless. It is philosophies that are not tied to practice. I want the ideas and the why behind those ideas."

T: We talked a lot about whole language last year- where it fit, values, issues related to classrooms. People came and went and some didn't hook into anything for a long time. Now they understand and use those ideas. They've fit them into their conceptual and classroom schemes. They are really using it this year.

T: We need to continue with evaluation and portfolios next year. When people write about it or talk about it, they assume that teachers already know how to do this, to interpret what they gather, and it's not true. We've relied on grades in the past. I'm not sure that given a whole portfolio on a child, I'm prepared to analyze it and state where a child is. I have the labels - self-evaluation, portfolios, kidwatching - but when I come up with something, what do I do with it? I don't want it just to be a bunch of words. I want to be able to move from there."

T: I have continued my focus this year on literature groups. I wasn't sure if my previous problems were behavioral or that the theory didn't fit. The groups are coming a bit together more. The thinking and behavior are matching more.

T: In the past, we did it because we were told to, not because we believed in it or really understood how to put it into practice. Now there's more openness and understanding.

T: "I went through open education and centers but I felt there was an emptiness, a missing link with teaching. The link was knowing that there's a way. That it's really workable and possible with guidance and support. I was missing how to put my beliefs into action."

P: There is a major dilemma of how a principal goes about getting to be less traditional when they as teachers invented tradition in their own classrooms. They were traditional and now are not experts and the concern is, how do you preach what you don't have first hand knowledge of?"

Thinking Through Theoretical Beliefs

T: I realize that things take longer than I had ever anticipated. Before I taught tiny pieces. Life is connected so I have to teach that way.

T: The biggest questions for me have to do with in what ways can I help children learn what they need to learn to grow up successfully and happily. It's not success in school but success in life. I am trying to create a superstructure now for inquiry and learning.

T: I don't want the group to subsume me but to support me. I don't want to be given an exact model or recipe. I want information to support developing my own theory so that I have a mirror to reflect everything else other people say.

Living the Experience as Adults

T: It's really irritating to me to take classes at the university and have people who tell you what to do. They don't show you what to do. It's much harder to try and understand either the theory or the ideas if you never experience it in the university class.

P: A second grader was given a book that she could read. The book was selected by the teacher for the child. What message is that sending to kids? As adults, we like to read at a variety of levels, yet we do not apply this to children.

P: We are not experiencing the literature. There is a lack of opportunities for us to experience the literature we are expecting our teachers to use. We need experiences to deal with it and feel it. We are intellectualizing about it but not doing it.

Changing Materials But Not Beliefs and Practices

P: I find some teachers have taken off with the literature as if it's basically something that the kids just do on their own and it's self-propelled. Others leave the literature for an, "If you can get all your work done, you can go to the ball." I saw it yesterday. A teacher used some stories cut out of an old basal series and bound them with a little green cover to make them look like books. They were doing weather, so they were old stories about clouds, like the old stilted language. When the kids finished those and answered some old style comprehension questions about those stories then they could read, Cloudy with a Chance of Meatballs. Some teachers are giving themselves more of a role in that it is doled out by the teaspoonful.

P: My concern is that literature is seen as too good to have for real reading. You read "real" books after you do your skills.

P: They (teachers) are so proud that they have these kids in groups that read their chapter then do this big packet of worksheets before they can discuss the story. I was really distressed when I saw this wonderful book having the life taken out of it by introducing a five page packet of worksheets.

P: The teachers love the stories in the new series, but they are not willing to let go of drill and practice worksheets.

P: Teachers are going by the book. They are using Houghton Mifflin as a basal. They are not changing.

P: During a faculty meeting, I acted as an irate parent who was questioning the use of book reports. I asked the teachers how they would react. As a parent, most teachers say they hate book reports too, so why do we do them? It is important to take a different perspective and look at what we ask kids to do. We then talked about different strategies on how teachers read and I asked, "Why don't we teach these same strategies to kids?"

P: You must vary what you do. It is not appropriate to do the same thing with the whole group. There should be different goals for different kids. Low kids need to engage in reading while high kids need to have the opportunity to take off. Homogenous groups should not be used all the time. There should be different types of grouping.

Category 6: Dealing with Change within Schools

Allowing Change to Happen Gradually Over Time

T: "I learned that if you believe in something, you keep on going even if it

doesn't work out right away. I don't feel like I have to have all the answers any more."

P: By observing teachers in their classrooms and interacting with them in the group, I have gained greater respect for them. I can see examples of situations where in the past I would have said, "I wish this was different" about something I saw in someone's classroom without understanding the why behind what was going on. I see that a beginning attempt to make a change could be seen as chaos or disinterest. Now I see what is being attempted and try to make suggestions because of the study group discussions.

T: When you see new ideas and there's too much at once, it seems overwhelming. I decided to take one new thing a year and not just dive into everything. When someone tries to do everything, it is threatening.

T: We need support to make major change. The changes have to be gradual and over time. We were just thrown into the water here and told to survive.

T: The biggest thing I learned last year and that held with me this year is that it doesn't matter what it looks like in the beginning, you stay with it. You don't quit just because it isn't perfect right away.

T: It's hard to keep on doing what you feel is right when the kids do not respond, when it's just not working. You have to keep going with what you know is right.

Dealing with the Fear and Difficulty of Change

T: We need to be able to share our inadequacies and fears. We have to be able to say it. You don't have to feel silly or afraid by yourself. You need to hear others say, "I don't do this."

T: When you are the one negotiating curriculum with students and you can't blame anybody else for your failure, it's scary. Before we could blame the district policy or the textbook. It can make you want some kind of guideline or mandate, so you don't have to take the responsibility.

T: It's enormous when you're changing your philosophy and your practices everyday. You are just thinking through all of this and working with kids and helping them and, at the same time, you're not sure where it is going to end up. It's really scary. Even when I have a really good day, I have this headache because I have to think so much.

T: There's an incredible fear that moving to a new program has created. In some settings where teachers and principals have not been given supportive training, they are afraid of what will happen. The basal has worked for them in the past and they blamed the kids or the basal if it didn't work. Now they don't know who to blame if it doesn't work and that's really scary.

P: I have some teachers who are very good with keeping children on task and implementing assertive discipline. They have established this classroom and they were very good for those standards that had been set. Now we have different standards and different things we want to do. We have told them for ten years, "You are very good. You are an excellent teacher." It is hard for them to understand that they are not excellent anymore. They need to change.

P: I still have teachers who are grading papers. They can't let go because they feel they must have something to show parents. Now they are beginning to look at the process. The teachers are comparing, contrasting and judging their own level of competence. I am encouraging teachers to trust their own judgement. It is okay to let go of grading papers.

P: I was out of school for two days and when I returned, over 5000 copies had

been made on the Xerox machine. A second grade teacher had been copying worksheets for this year, next year and the year after. I went to the teacher and asked if she felt that the student in her class three years from now will be the same as her current group. The teacher told me that they would be different. I asked then, why she would expect them to do the same work? The teacher told me that the kids would still need the same skills.

Facilitating Change for Teachers

P: I put a teacher with a more effective teacher. This teacher comes into the classroom and models units for the other teacher. Modeling in the classroom helps them to see that there is another way. It is hard to ignore a new strategy when it works with the kids in your own classroom.

P: I have some teachers who don't want to go and observe. One of my teachers finally volunteered and slowly, over time others have begun to observe others. Some people interpret change as meaning something is wrong with you.

P: I provided an inservice for my teachers on using literature. One second grade teacher is still doing round robin reading and worksheets and feels she is doing well.

Change as Related to Primary and Intermediate Teachers

P: I see a real difference in my primary and intermediate teachers. The primary seem to be real excited about the literature adoption and they've worked for hours to do motivating, exciting things and they are having pretty good discussions about the story. I get real encouraged when I go into the primary rooms and then I go into fifth and sixth grade classrooms and I think, "yuck." It is almost as if it's above the teacher to sit down and discuss a story with a child. It's really upsetting to me when I go in and I see the assignments on the board. You are to do this and there's a dead silence in that room until eleven or twelve, the magic hour for a break or something. It's all independent work with no discussion or interaction.

P: There is more excitement in primary classrooms. Primary teachers are more responsive to kids and there is more empathy. Intermediate teachers begin to step away from the kids. There is a space between the teacher and the kids and the teacher is not responding to the children.

P: I've said for years that what I'd like to do is to have all incoming teachers, teach primary and then they are "promoted." Because the ones in my intermediate who were once primary teachers are a whole different type of teacher than the ones who have always been in intermediate.

Outside Pressures

T: I always had this pull between the district structure and what I really thought was the right thing to do. Internally I knew what was right, but I had so many people telling me what to do and I had ITBS scores and all this stuff jammed down my throat. Then I'd start feeling guilty like I'm not doing enough and I felt pulled all the time and I'd try to do a little of everything.

T: I have had other teachers call and ask for real specific information on the checklists for kids who moved from my classroom. So I have had to use them even though I don't find them helpful at all.

T: We have a whole community of parents out there who don't understand what we are doing. They believe in test scores. We haven't really talked to parents about what we are doing in our classrooms.

T: Are they ready? We are always talking about preparing kids for the next year's teacher. We live in dread of that teacher.

P: As a principal, the question I am asked most often this year by parents is why are test scores so low?

P: The community wants high test scores. The problem becomes more prevalent with the upper grades because that is when they scores begin to mean something.

Isolation and the Need for Peer Support

T: Teachers are so isolated and when you try something new, it goes downhill at first. It's all changing and you don't know if you can count on anything. A speaker said that unless there's some kind of peer coaching or peer work, very little change actually occurs no matter how many workshops or follow-ups there are.

T: We rarely get to develop collegial relationships. We need to learn to dialogue with others on professional issues. We need to share and reply rather than present and assess. I'm not used to having the chance to discuss practice in a non-evaluative way.

T: I liked the discussions about classroom specifics related to management problems. I realized that other people were concerned about this too. It wasn't just me. I felt like I was taken out of isolation. Others are experiencing what I am. Some of them had solutions I could use.

T: We're more than the sum of our parts and if we all realize that we are experts in what we do and we don't have to feel like somebody's better than us, then we start getting more information by sharing with each other instead of being isolated.

T: The study group added structure for moving away and helped me keep going when the tendency was to quit. Usually when I get bogged down, there's no way to generate ideas to move on. It helped that that kind of support was available and so I continued to try.

Conclusion

As we compared the data across the teacher and principal study groups, several issues were highlighted. One was the tremendous sense of isolation that was shared by both teachers and principals and the value they placed on having opportunities to develop a sense of community with their peers. Another was their need to have more time for reflection within their busy lives as educators. The study group provided the time and social context to support reflection on their experiences in schools and classrooms and on the ideas they were encountering in inservices. They began to view learning and change as a natural part of professional life, not an indication that something was "wrong" and needed to be "fixed" by outside experts. Because they had time to reflect on beliefs and practices with other educators, they were able to integrate theory and practice in more powerful ways for themselves. In addition, their participation in a collaborative learning environment allowed them to live the process as adults that they were exploring in their schools and classrooms with children.

The study group process supported participants in actively setting their own agenda for discussion and in critically reflecting on and examining their practices and beliefs with other educators. The groups were a place to think with others, share ideas and challege current thinking and instructional practices; explore the relationship between theory and practice; select topics related to professional and personal needs; and develop innovations for classroom and school use. The study groups accomodated diversity and supported participants in developing their own paths to learning and transformation. When educators have the time to think with each other and create their own conditions for change, new potentials for transformation within the school context are made available.

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